The Sturgeon English

Early one Sunday morning, with the sun shining brightly on the rippling waters of Tungting Lake, Hsiao Ling, a Little Red Guard, and her younger brother Hsiao Lung row into the lake in a small boat.

It is the height of the fishing season, and their father has sailed off to the lake with other fishermen before dawn. He has asked Hsiao Ling and Hsiao Lung to go and have a look at the line of fish hooks their production brigade has set in the lake.

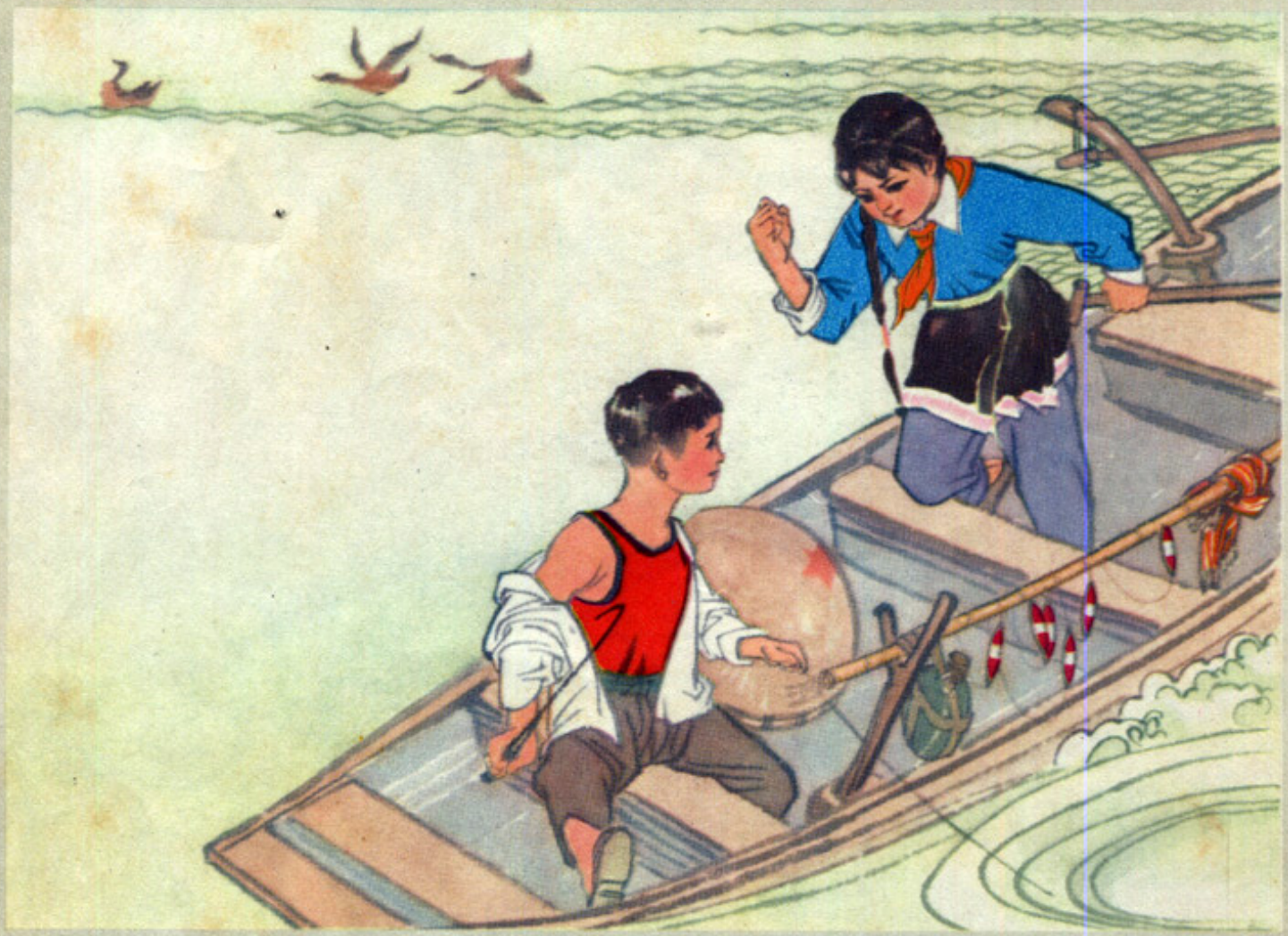
The lake shimmers beautifully in the sunshine. Silvery gulls skim over the blue water, and egrets stretch their necks to seize food from it. Hsiao Ling plies the oars while Hsiao Lung looks over the hooks. The children sing together happily.

Suddenly the waters swirl and their little boat tosses violently. A huge sturgeon appears above the water, its back glistening in the sun.

"What a big sturgeon!" cries Hsiao Lung in surprise. "It must weigh several hundred pounds!" It's caught in the hooks and thrashes about to free itself. "Loosen the line, Hsiao Lung," shouts Hsiao Ling. "Quick!"

Hsiao Lung slackens the line the fish is caught in. But the sturgeon flops over and disappears beneath the water, churning up a whirlpool.

Fortunately Hsiao Lung lets the line out in time or their boat would be overturned. Now they have to prevent the fish from getting away together with all the brigade's fish hooks.



"We fish for the revolution!" Hsiao Ling recalls the words of Uncle Chang, the brigade Party secretary. Her father also said, "Take good care of the fish hooks; they are collective property." So she tells her brother that they must save the hooks and catch the big fish too.

Hsiao Ling lets the line out from the bamboo pole so the sturgeon cannot break it. Then she fixes a float on it to keep track of the fish.

The sturgeon darts forward, trailing the float behind. The children row as fast as they can after it.

The fish is tired and floats on the water, giving Hsiao Ling and Hsiao Lung a chance to catch up and cautiously ease it into the shallows.

But the fish turns suddenly and makes for the depths of the lake. Hsiao Ling promptly lets out the line and they chase after the float.

When the fish tires again, they try towing it to the shore. But the fish keeps struggling back, and they try again and again for several hours until they are far out in the lake.

Fatigued and hungry, Hsiao Ling asks Hsiao Lung if it is too much for him. "No," says he determinedly. "Let's keep on and we'll be sure to get that fish!"

"You're right," Hsiao Ling says encouragingly. "We fish for the revolution. we've nothing to fear."

Now the sturgeon, wounded by the hooks, struggles desperately, stirring up the water and tossing the little boat.

Though the children have grown up on the lake shore, they've never had such an experience. Hsiao Lung is thrown off his balance and falls overboard.

Just then the fish darts forward crazily. "Don't let the fish get away," Hsiao Lung shouts from the water to his sister.

Hsiao Ling gives her brother a hand and pulls him back on to the boat.

The float is far away by now. The children put on a spurt and follow in its wake.

But before they know it, both wake and float disappear. How are they to find such a small float in such a big lake!

Gulls circling overhead tell the children that there are fish there.

Suddenly, in the slanting rays of the sun, the children see a disturbance in the water and rush to the place. "There it goes!" they shout, finding the float in a whirlpool.

However hard it tries, the sturgeon fails to get free of the hooks and only exhausts itself. Hsiao Ling and Hsiao Lung lose no time to haul it in.

When the fish is finally pulled in to shallow water, the children exclaim, "Look at the size of it!"

Entirely worn out, the children long for their father and Uncle Chang to come to help them.

But suppose the sturgeon gets away again. Recalling Chairman Mao's words: **"Be resolute, fear no sacrifice and surmount every difficulty to win victory,"** the children decide to haul the fish ashore themselves.

They must do it quickly, for after dark their job will be still harder. Hsiao Ling gives the fish a good prodding with her bamboo pole.

The sturgeon lunges forward, heading for the shore. Its sudden thrust shoves the boat, throwing the children out.

Though tired and hungry, Hsiao Lung follows Hsiao Ling's example and helps drive the sturgeon on. It thrashes about and turns the shallows into a muddy pool.

It is dusk by the time the fish finally lies motionless. As Hsiao Ling wipes the sweat and mud from her brother's face, he says happily, "Father and Uncle Chang will be glad to know we've landed the big sturgeon."

A full moon is rising. The children's father and the other fishermen have been looking for them, shouting their names. Their father fires into the air with his shot-gun.